



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Black History Month event at MWRD focuses on environmental justice and advocating for equity



Participants in the MWRD's Black History Month celebration and panel included (Front row, L-R): MWRD Environmental Justice Section Principal Civil Engineer Lolita Thompson, People for Community Recovery Executive Director Cheryl Johnson, Blacks in Green™ Founder/CEO Naomi Davis, Faith in Place Policy/Advocacy Director Pastor Scott Onqu , SEIU Healthcare President Greg Kelley and WBEZ Data Projects Editor Alden Loury. (Back row, L-R): MWRD Executive Director Brian A. Perkovich, MWRD Chairman of Finance Commissioner Marcelino Garcia, MWRD Vice President Kimberly Du Buclet, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, MWRD Commissioner Yumeka Brown and MWRD Commissioner Daniel Pogorzelski.

Raising awareness for environmental justice, equity and the African American experience, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) continued its tradition of Black History Month programming and celebration by hosting a forum that featured a talented lineup of insightful speakers.

For the first time since 2020, the MWRD held its Black History Month celebration, convening a panel of speakers to highlight African American History Month, while bringing important issues to the forefront in the MWRD's work protecting the region's water environment. Watch the event video at <https://youtu.be/tUfl3NoGiZA>.

"Our Black History Month event presents an evening to celebrate, commemorate and highlight our work in the context of equity and diversity," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "We take into consideration environmental justice protections in our work to protect area water quality, and tonight's forum elevates this important work for the diverse communities we serve. Thank you all for helping us celebrate and contribute to this conversation."

Speakers included MWRD President Steele and Vice President Kimberly Du Buclet, along with Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton, Chicago Urban League President and CEO Karen Freeman-Wilson and MWRD Environmental Justice (*continued*)

## Black History Month event at MWRD, *cont.*



*The MWRD Board room became a lively and captivating forum for discussion on equity and environmental justice during the MWRD's Black History Month celebration on Feb. 16.*



*Former MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan greets the crowd during the Black History Month celebration held at the building bearing her name on Feb. 16.*



*(L-R): MWRD Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos, MWRD Diversity Administrator Regina Berry, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, MWRD Vice President Kimberly Du Buclet and MWRD Commissioner Yumeka Brown celebrate Black History Month on Feb. 16.*



*(L-R): MWRD Commissioner Yumeka Brown, MWRD Commissioner Patricia Theresa Flynn and Vice President Kimberly Du Buclet celebrate Black History Month on Feb. 16.*

Section Principal Civil Engineer Lolita Thompson. A panel, moderated by WBEZ Data Projects Editor Alden Loury, featured Blacks in Green™ Founder/CEO Naomi Davis, People for Community Recovery Executive Director Cheryl Johnson, SEIU Healthcare President Greg Kelley and Faith in Place Policy/Advocacy Director Pastor Scott Onqué. Speakers were recognized earlier that day with a resolution introduced by the MWRD Board of Commissioners.

The panel discussed environmental justice issues and how community leaders and others advocate for equity. The event follows the MWRD's recent adoption of a new policy to integrate environmental justice considerations into all MWRD programs, policies and activities wherever possible. The MWRD is in the middle of a five-year Strategic Plan, 2021-2025, that expanded its values from excellence, respect, innovation, safety and accountability, to also include equity and diversity.

"We appreciate the opportunity to bring so many unique perspectives together for one night to commemorate Black History Month and advance causes of justice and equity in our region," said MWRD Vice President Kimberly Du Buclet. "Thank you to the many guests and staff who attended and made this a memorable occasion."

The event at the MWRD's McGowan Main Office Building, 100 E. Erie St., was part of a series of Black History Month festivities in February. On Feb. 1, the MWRD raised the Pan-African flag at the Building as well as at all seven of its water reclamation plants. On Feb. 22, the MWRD held a virtual business roundtable to discuss how community leaders advocate for equity in contracting and how minority-owned business enterprises can learn more about business opportunities with the MWRD. MWRD staff, including Diversity Administrator Regina Berry, Director of Engineering Catherine O'Connor, and Director of Procurement and Materials Management Darlene LoCascio participated in the roundtable with area business leaders including Larry Ivory, President/CEO at the Illinois Black Chamber of Commerce; Jonathan Jones, Director of Diversity, Mid-America Carpenters Regional Council - Labor Brother's United and Omar Shareef, President, African American Contractor's Association.

The MWRD will also participate in the Black Creativity Career Showcase at the Museum of Science and Industry, 5700 S. Du Sable Lake Shore Drive to engage students in STEM careers and shed light on the important work of the MWRD protecting the region's water environment.

### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at [mwrld.org](http://mwrld.org).*